

## **VI, A. Assessment of Program Effectiveness**

### **Permit Compliance**

The City of Santa Clarita takes great pride in being a responsible steward of the Santa Clara River and setting a good example for the community. The Santa Clara River is one of the last natural rivers in Southern California. The City strives to maintain habitat and keep wildlife corridors open in addition to compliance with issues related to water quality. A great deal of effort is being made to meet the intent of the NPDES permit to ensure the City is making the best use of limited resources. The numerous elements of the permit are centralized through the City's Environmental Service Division that coordinates the implementation in other divisions.

Though the City has a dedicated Stormwater Utility Fee in place, charging all property owners to fund costs of complying with the NPDES permit, the funding source has reached its maximum limit. When the City created the fee, before Proposition 218, it did not include a mechanism for keeping up with inflation. As a result, the City is not able to raise the fee without a 2/3 affirmative vote from the public (or if Stormwater Utility Fees were exempted from Proposition 218). With increasing demands contained in the permit, the City is now forced to compromise items such as sweeping all streets every week to a less frequent schedule of every other week and "screening the closed storm drain system in priority areas" in order to maintain the financial viability of the rest of the program. However, through a system of cost saving and fiscal responsibility, the City is able to purchase a new Vactor truck for storm drain maintenance that also has the capability to screen the storm drain system. Although the City did not complete this task within the timeframe dictated in the permit, this task will be accomplished at a later date.

Placing trash containers at every bus stop has also proven to be a challenge. In order to accomplish this in a cost-effective, efficient manner, the City chose to utilize the Department of Conservation Block Grant to pay for trash and recycling containers. The containers already at the sheltered bus stops are working, but there have been complaints regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) with complaints about the containers blocking the sidewalks. In addition, in order for the containers to be accessible for automated collection by the waste hauler, the containers need to be designed so that they can be emptied using the hydraulic arm as part of the automated system on the trash trucks. Many of the containers have broken and/or have been vandalized, leading to a poor appearance. The City is still placing trash cans at the bus stops, but is evaluating the site conditions on more of a case by case basis to ensure safety, accessibility, and other factors are considered.

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation of our storm water program is based on the trends very similar to the information contained in the Annual Report. We continue to focus our primary efforts on a strategy of complying with the permit requirements. The City does this while seeking the most cost-effective methods to obtain the intent of the permit. Trends in the type of illicit discharges, their location and responsible parties are also being tracked. Also, as required by the permit, the amount of debris being pulled from the catch basins is recorded and provided in this report. Other items to consider are the trends of certain constituents at the mass emission monitoring

station. Coupled with qualitative information such as the performance of the storm drain system during heavy rainy seasons indicates that the program is doing well.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Stormwater Program**

There are many strengths with Santa Clarita's stormwater program. The City's outreach efforts remain strong and these efforts help to encourage residents to report dumping and increase awareness of the stormwater issues for the Santa Clara River. For instance, the local outreach program includes many handouts, newspaper advertisements, magazine advertisements, radio ads, giveaways, special events and other activities that are highlighted throughout the annual report. But the greatest strength of the City of Santa Clarita's Stormwater Program is the staff members. In spite of limited resources, staff has found creative ways to make the program work in the most effective manner.

The Santa Clarita Storm Drain Maintenance program continues to provide quality service to the community and has maintained the City owned catch basins to the high standards of the permit. This year's rainy season saw very little rain and, as a result, the catch basins were somewhat barren as compared to previous years. The crew members made their rounds and collected the debris in the basins, but there was only about one-third of the normal amount found in prior years. However, as a result of the excellent cleaning program in place and pre-planning for the storm events, clogging of catch basins was kept to a minimum during major storms. Utilizing heavy vacuum equipment and experienced personnel directly responsible to Environmental Services has kept this program focused, the storm drains clean, and the system in compliance with the permit. The Storm Drain Maintenance component of the Environmental Services Division is very responsive to maintenance issues and citizen odor concerns in addition to the routine cleaning of the catch basins.

Field inspectors actively seeking out illicit discharges and connections reflects the proactive approach the City has taken with the Illicit Connection/Illicit Discharge (IC/ID) program. The IC/ID database is used for tracking complaints, discharges and connections. Inspectors use laptop computers in the field to allow them to collect all pertinent information and review for prior incidents. The database allows the inspectors to generate monthly and annual reports for review and to discover any trends. The database tracks specific types of discharges and plots them on a map allowing the City to determine areas of pollutant specific concerns which, in turn, gives staff locations to monitor more frequently or mail out specific outreach material.

Construction and development continued to slow this past fiscal year mostly due to economic issues. As a result, the number of Standard Urban Stormwater Mitigation Plans (SUSMP) and Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans (SWPPP) the City processed is lower than previous years. The City retained the services of two consultants, AEI-CASC Engineering and California Watershed Engineering, both of which have engineering staff specializing in reviewing SUSMPs and SWPPPs. Having consultant engineers dedicated to the SUSMPs and SWPPPs allows direct communication with the developers/engineers regarding the stormwater details of their individual projects. This has led to better understanding and compliance with the SUSMP by developers as a whole that do business with the City. The SUSMP is a standard part of the development process and many developments are being subjected to this requirement. However, it remains a challenge to the development community to comply with the Regional Board's

interpretation of the permit requirement to treat and infiltrate stormwater runoff from their projects. It has proven difficult to dedicate areas on projects to infiltrate water in addition to having the right soil conditions to percolate particularly in Northern Los Angeles County. Developers of multiple Priority Projects have learned with each project what is expected for the City to accept their project for storm water requirements. Educating developers and engineers during the Development Review Committee meeting, over the counter review of site plans, in the field, over phone conversations and the plan check process is ongoing.

A weakness in the Stormwater Program has proven to be the funding mechanism for the Stormwater Utility. When the Utility was created in 1995, the Ordinance contained a maximum dollar amount. With the advent of Proposition 218, this dollar amount can not be increased without a majority vote. Given the fact that there are increasing demands contained in the permit and a finite funding source, the City is forced to limit funding for one portion of the permit in order to pay for another. Funding decisions are based on the overall benefits of certain activities. For example, the City was forced to compromise items such as sweeping all streets every week to a less frequent schedule of every other week. Screening the closed storm drain system in priority areas was put on hold until a new Vactor truck with this capability could be purchased at a later date. This was done in order to maintain the financial viability of the rest of the program.

### **Highlights and Accomplishments**

The City is proud to continue the annual River Rally event in September to coincide with Pollution Prevention Week. This event encourages the residents of the Santa Clarita Valley to participate in picking up trash and debris in various sections of the Santa Clara River. Last year's event had well over 1,200 volunteers. The message the City is getting out about storm water pollution prevention is well received. The River Rally event is more popular every year, allowing for increased educational opportunities and residents actively participating in storm water quality issues and has created a sense of environmental stewardship within the community.

The City continued its working relationship with the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts with site specific outreach materials educating the community about the effects of self-regenerating water softeners and the chloride they generate and add to the river. The City continues to receive inquiries about this issue and have learned that over 1,900 of these particular types of water softeners have been voluntarily removed from Santa Clarita Valley households. That translates to an estimated amount of over 83,000 pounds of salt removed from the Santa Clara River.

### **Interagency Coordination**

Watershed based concerns are an important part of the goals in the City to improve overall water quality. In cooperation with the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts, the issue of chloride in the river is being met with an aggressive outreach campaign encouraging residents to discontinue use of self-regenerating water softeners while a ban on new installation of these devices was enacted in March 2003. The Santa Clara River Watershed has a mass emissions monitoring station in the Los Angeles County unincorporated/City of Santa Clarita area, directly below the 5 Freeway near Magic Mountain Parkway. Los Angeles County Department of Public Works uses the station for mass emission monitoring. Though the station has only been operational since 2002, the City has been monitoring the data results to discover any trends.

The City has cooperated with Los Angeles County on the New Development Impacts Study in the Santa Clara River Watershed. This study was required by the permit to evaluate SUSMP effectiveness. This study has been submitted to the Regional Board but has not been approved to date.

The City is also part of the Integrated Regional Watershed Management Plan (IRWMP) for the Upper Santa Clara River Watershed. The IRWMP includes the City, the Castaic Lake Water Agency, Los Angeles County Flood Control District, Newhall County Water District, Santa Clarita Water Division, Santa Clarita Valley Sanitation District of Los Angeles County, and the Valencia Water Company as well as various stakeholders including environmental groups, members of local town councils and local residents. The purpose of the IRWMP is to integrate planning and implementation efforts and facilitate regional cooperation with the goals of reducing water demand, improving operational efficiency, increasing water supply reliability, improving water quality, and improving resource stewardship.

### **Future Plans**

The City of Santa Clarita is excited to take part in the IRWMP for the Upper Santa Clara River Watershed. The purpose of the IRWMP is to integrate planning and implementation efforts and facilitate regional cooperation with the goals of reducing water demands, improving operational efficiency, increasing water supply reliability, improving water quality, and improving resource stewardship. Specifically, it will provide ongoing guidance and prioritization regarding implementation projects, for Proposition 50 and Proposition 84 Grants as well as other funding sources. The IRWMP is the product of a collaborative stakeholder process conducted under the direction of the RWMG. The IRWMP reflects the unique needs of the Upper Watershed, which encompasses the City of Santa Clarita, the towns of Castaic, Stevenson Ranch, West Ranch, Agua Dulce and Acton, various unincorporated community areas in Los Angeles County, open space areas of the Santa Monica Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority and Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, and portions of the Angeles National Forest.

A broad stakeholder outreach process was utilized to ensure that the IRWMP identified local issues, reflects local needs, promotes the formation of partnerships, and encourages coordination with state and federal agencies. One of the benefits of the planning process is that it brought together a broad collection of stakeholders into a forum to discuss and better understand shared needs and opportunities in regards to the river and groundwater. Residents of the region are aware that there are challenges ahead concerning water resources and possible drought conditions as well as the continued stewardship of environmental resources. Agencies and planning jurisdictions are working closely together in order to assure the delivery of clean, reliable water supplies while maintaining the quality of life and environmental values in the region.

This IRWMP benefits from active participation by a wide range of stakeholders. Stakeholders participated in periodic meetings throughout the fiscal year, reviewed draft document materials, and provided extensive collaborative input to shape the formation of the IRWMP. By participating in stakeholder meetings to create the IRWMP, participants were exposed to a variety of opportunities for discovering and establishing mutually beneficial partnerships.

Agencies in the region recognize the needs and benefits of regional cooperation and planning. In an effort to adequately represent the Region, a Regional Watershed Management Group (RWMG) was formed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2007. All seven agencies of the RWMG are signatories to the MOU. The formation of this group has strengthened the ability of the Region to address common needs and challenges. The RWMG includes the City of Santa Clarita, the Castaic Lake Water Agency (CLWA), Los Angeles County Flood Control District (LACFCD), Newhall County Water District (NCWD), Santa Clarita Water Division (SCWD) of CLWA, Santa Clarita Valley Sanitation District (SCVSD) of Los Angeles County, and Valencia Water Company (VWC).

An objective of the IRWMP is to build on a long-standing foundation of cooperation started in existing efforts such as the Upper Santa Clara River Chloride TMDL Collaborative Process and the Santa Clara River Enhancement and Management Plan. The objective of the IRWMP is not to duplicate existing and ongoing plans, but to better integrate these efforts and results and to put forward the projects needed to address the identified regional goals.

#### **Suggestions to Improve the Effectiveness of the Program**

The City of Santa Clarita is constantly striving to improve all of its processes, duties and activities of the Stormwater Program. Aside from the need to find additional funding for the many aspects of NPDES permit, the Stormwater Program is very strong and is well situated to maintain good water quality in the Santa Clara River.